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RETIRED GREEN BERETS THREATENED
FAYETTEVILLE, N.C.

An attorney for two retired Green Berets fighting federal officials in attempts to trace American prisoners in Southeast Asia says government agents may be behind threats against his clients.

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Mark Waple, who represents Maj. Mark Smith and Sgt. Melvin McIntire, said he believes the two men are in danger because U.S. intelligence agents want to suppress the information they are gathering.

Since Smith and McIntire filed a lawsuit last year claiming that the government has ignored evidence of American prisoners of war held in Southeast Asia, they have received death threats, Waple said.

"Their lives have been threatened, but I can't prove" government agents are behind it, Waple told Monday's Greensboro News & Record. "But you can't intimidate these people. They are the personification of what it is to be an American soldier.

"They're tough. They're fit, fearless and extremely well-trained. They're not easily intimidated, particularly not on this case," Waple said.

Smith and McIntire, along with family members of four servicemen reported missing in action in Vietnam, claim in their lawsuit that the government has disregarded and discredited evidence of POWs possibly alive in Southeast Asia.

Patti Volz, a spokeswoman for the Central Intelligence Agency, called Waple's comments about the nation's intelligence gathering community "ridiculous."

"Oh, that's foolish," she said. "The CIA does not go around killing people."

Volz also said that since the mid-1970s, U.S. agencies have been prohibited by executive order from taking part in assassinations.

Since the lawsuit was filed, Smith and McIntire have continued their search for more evidence about the hundreds of men they believe are being held captive. Waple said the two soldiers were overseas last week trying to pinpoint information that would strengthen their case against what they see as government inaction despite irrefutable evidence.

Lt. Col. Keith Schneider, a Defense Department spokesman, rejected Waple's allegations.

"We categorically deny any allegations that the United States has suppressed or covered up anything that (indicates) Americans who are still missing and unaccounted for in Indochina" are alive, he said.